

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Educational Administration: Theses, Dissertations,  
and Student Research

Educational Administration, Department of

---


Spring 4-17-2015

# Undergraduate Chinese Student College Choice: Chinese Student Growth at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Jacob Hoy-Elswick

*University of Nebraska-Lincoln*, [jhoy-elswick2@unl.edu](mailto:jhoy-elswick2@unl.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cehsedaddiss>

 Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Educational Psychology Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), [Higher Education Administration Commons](#), and the [International and Comparative Education Commons](#)

---

Hoy-Elswick, Jacob, "Undergraduate Chinese Student College Choice: Chinese Student Growth at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln" (2015). *Educational Administration: Theses, Dissertations, and Student Research*. 224.  
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cehsedaddiss/224>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Educational Administration, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Educational Administration: Theses, Dissertations, and Student Research by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Undergraduate Chinese Student College Choice:  
Chinese Student Growth at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln

By

Jacob Hoy-Elswick

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts

Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Professor James Griesen

Lincoln, Nebraska

May 2015

Undergraduate Chinese Student College Choice:  
Chinese Student Growth at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Jake Hoy-Elswick, M.A.

University of Nebraska, 2015

Advisor: James V. Griesen

In this mixed methods study, the researcher explored the importance of institutional characteristics and people who were influential in the college choice of first-year undergraduate Chinese students at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL). The purpose of the research was to understand the impact and interplay of variables that previous research has shown to be significant in Chinese student decision making and how those variables applied to first-year students at UNL. A quantitative survey was administered to and completed by 25 students ( $n = 25$ ) and analyzed through multivariate correlations. Qualitative surveys were then conducted with three students to gain depth and context to their answers. The results confirmed previous research and identifies interesting patterns between the importance of communication with different influencers and institutional characteristics. Interesting findings include the importance of communication timing to different influencers as well as the independent influence parents play on the decision making process. This study includes information from existing literature, outlines the methodology used for this research, reports findings of the quantitative and qualitative instrument and discusses outcomes and implications of the findings.

## Acknowledgements

The past four years leading up to the completion of this project would not have been possible without a tribe of supporters that have pushed me to work hard and sacrificed for my benefit and to my goal of completing my Master's degree.

First and foremost, my wife, Jill who has put up with late nights and absences from family events as I persisted through homework and projects during all seasons of life.

To my parents for creating the expectation that someday I would earn a post-graduate degree and providing the opportunities that allowed me to explore and learn.

My success would not be possible without the students and parents who put their trust and faith in me as they embark on their educational journey. I am truly humbled and reverent for the belief and responsibility they put in my hands.

Completing this degree is in no small part in thanks to my advisor Dr. Jim Griesen who has taken the time to mentor me in the ways of academia and as a professional working in higher education.

Finally, to my colleagues in the Office of Admissions and those who recruit for institutions across the United States from whom I have learned so much and without whom I would not be in this position.

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Introduction .....	1
Purpose Statement .....	2
Research Questions .....	3
Research Design .....	3
Definition of Terms .....	4
Significance .....	6
Limitations.....	7
Assumptions.....	7
Conclusion.....	8
Chapter 2 – Literature Review .....	9
Purpose Statement .....	9
Introduction .....	9
Influencers .....	10
Institutional Characteristics .....	13
Conclusion.....	16
Chapter 3 – Methodology.....	17
Purpose Statement .....	17
Reflexivity Statement.....	18
Research Questions .....	19
A Mixed Methods Approach .....	20

Research Population .....	21
Research Site.....	22
Institutional Review Board Approval .....	22
Research Process .....	23
Quantitative Survey .....	24
Limitations of Quantitative Instrument .....	27
Qualitative Interviews.....	28
Part 1: Explanation of Survey.....	29
Part 2: Informed Consent.....	29
Part 3: Interview Questions .....	29
Part 4: Concluding the Interview .....	29
Limitations of Qualitative Instrument .....	30
Data Analysis.....	30
Chapter 4 – Findings .....	31
Demographic Characteristics of Participants.....	32
Research Question 1: Institutional Characteristics.....	34
Research Question 2: Influential People in Decision Making.....	40
Research Question 3: Communication with UNL Prior to Enrolling .....	45
Research Questions 4: First Contact with UNL .....	47
Conclusion.....	47
Chapter 5 – Discussion.....	49
The Role of Institutional Characteristics and Influencers.....	49

Bias and Participation .....	52
Suggestions for Future Research .....	53
Conclusions .....	55
References .....	57
Appendices	
Appendix A – Initial Recruitment Message for Quantitative Survey .....	65
Appendix B – Follow-up Message for Quantitative Survey .....	66
Appendix C – Second Recruitment Message for Interview .....	67
Appendix D – Survey Informed Consent .....	68
Appendix E – Interview Informed Consent .....	69
Appendix F – Qualitative Survey .....	71
Appendix G – Individual Interview Questions .....	74
Appendix H – Office of Admissions Collaborative Letter .....	75
Appendix I – Office of the University Registrar Support Letter .....	76

## List of Tables

Table 1	Demographic Characteristics .....	33
Table 2	Percent Distributions of University Characteristics .....	35
Table 3	Correlations between University Characteristics.....	37
Table 4	Percent Distributions of Influencers .....	41
Table 5	Correlations between Influential People in Decision Making.....	43
Table 6	Percent Distributions of Communication.....	46
Table 7	Percent Distributions of First Contact with UNL .....	48



## List of Appendices

Appendix A – Initial Recruitment Message for Quantitative Survey .....	65
Appendix B – Follow-up Message for Quantitative Survey .....	66
Appendix C – Second Recruitment Message for Interview .....	67
Appendix D – Survey Informed Consent.....	68
Appendix E – Interview Informed Consent.....	69
Appendix F – Qualitative Survey .....	71
Appendix G – Individual Interview Questions .....	74
Appendix H – Office of Admissions Collaborative Letter.....	75
Appendix I – Office of the University Registrar Support Letter .....	76

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

In the years following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 the United States government tightened immigration policies that severely restricted the mobility of international students into the United States (Harper & Quaye, 2009). In the decade that followed the trickle of international students into the United States has turned into a robust flow of students from all over the world (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). China has led the surge enrolling 235,597 students in U.S. universities in 2013, an increase of 21.4% from 2012 and 28% of all international students in the United States (Institute for International Education, 2013).

As students begin the search for overseas universities they must first identify supportive immigration policies in host countries that allow them to pursue their education in a particular country, a national policy over which academic institutions have no control (Bodycott, 2009; He & Bonham, 2011; Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007). In examining mobility data from multiple countries Verbik and Lasanowski (2007) found that countries whose residency and employment privileges were more welcoming to foreign workers made themselves more attractive as an educational destination. Additionally, those countries that had work programs targeting foreign students who graduated in that country had higher numbers of international students (He & Bonham, 2011).

Although U.S. immigration policy is not as welcoming as those of other countries, Chinese students continue to flock to U.S. institutions in growing numbers each year (Harper & Quaye, 2009). The decision in a Chinese student's choice of university is

determined by influencers, those individuals to whom students look for advice, and institutional characteristics such as location, cost and reputation (Massey, et al. 2003; Prado, 2008; Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Simpson & Tan, 2009). This study explores and attempts to better understand the decision making process of undergraduate Chinese students who have chosen to study at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL).

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL) is currently in the midst of an aggressive push to increase enrollment by 5,000 undergraduate students by the year 2020. In 2011, Chancellor Harvey Pearlman announced a goal of increasing the student population at UNL to a total of 30,000 students (Perlman, 2011). In his State of the University address Perlman cited UNL’s admission to the Big 10 Conference and the Committee on Institution Cooperation as the catalyst for growth as UNL entered a new era of academic cooperation and athletic competition. In order to reach this ambitious goal, 20 percent of the enrollment growth is expected to come from international students. As a collaborative initiative between the author’s graduate thesis and UNL’s Office of Admissions, this research served a dual purpose in its goal of better understanding why undergraduate Chinese students have chosen to study at UNL.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this research was to better understand why Chinese students choose the University of Nebraska–Lincoln for their undergraduate degree. There are currently over 235,000 Chinese students studying in the United States but current research is limited in its examination of these students and what specific factors attracted them to a particular institution (IIE, 2013). There is research that exists to suggest that the two primary drivers on the decision to choose an institution are influencers, or people

who provide advice and assistance to students, and institutional characteristics that attract students to a particular type of institution. Within each of these factors, characteristics such as institutional rankings, cost, safety, and career prospects influence Chinese student choice (Bodycott, 2009; Bodycott & Lai, 2012; He & Bonham, 2011; Park, 2010; Simpson & Tan, 2009). This research attempted to understand what influence individuals and institutional characteristics have on the decision of undergraduate Chinese students to study at UNL.

### **Research Questions**

1. What characteristics were most influential in your decision to study at UNL?
2. What people were most influential in your decision to study at UNL?
3. In what ways did you communicate with UNL prior to enrolling?
4. How did you first hear about UNL?

### **Research Design**

A mixed methods approach was used in this study to understand the factors and people who were most influential in the choice to study at UNL. This approach utilizes quantitative and qualitative data to develop a higher degree of understanding in answering a question or problem (Mertens, 2010).

The population for this study consists of undergraduate Chinese students who were newly enrolled at UNL in the fall 2014 academic term beginning in August 2014. The University of Nebraska–Lincoln is a four-year, public research university located in Lincoln, NE (University of Nebraska, 2014). In 2014, UNL enrolled 19,979 undergraduate students of which, 727 were Chinese citizens. Contact information was obtained for all newly entering transfer and freshmen undergraduate Chinese students for

the fall 2014 term. A quantitative survey was sent to 312 students of which 36 responded to an initial invitation to participate with 25 students completing the quantitative instrument. The qualitative survey was administered through individual interviews with three students to further understand their experience in selecting UNL as a destination to pursue their bachelor's degree.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Influencer:* Any individual member of familial or peer groups, educational setting, or private sector employee who exerts influence on a student's college choice

*Institutional characteristics:* Any characteristic, regardless of whether an institutions controls the characteristic, that is influential in a student's selection to attend or not attend a particular institution

*International Student:* A foreign citizen who wishes to enter the United States to pursue study at a U.S. institution (Department of State, 2014)

*Chinese student:* Chinese citizen pursuing study in the United States (Department of State, 2014)

*Educational Agent:* Individuals who are paid to represent or serve as proxies to students in the college search process and provide support and advice (De Luca, 2010)

*Freshman Student:* Student entering UNL with less than 12 university credit hours (UNL, 2014)

*Transfer Student:* Student entering UNL with 12 or more university credit hours (UNL, 2014)

*Parents:* Biological parents or legal guardians

*Teacher at your school in China:* Any institutional instructor a student had in China prior to coming to studying in the U.S.

*Academic counselor at your school in China:* An individual at the student's school in China responsible for assisting students in pursuing higher education regardless of destination country or institution

*UNL Staff Member:* Any institutional administrator, faculty or staff member at UNL

*UNL Alumni:* Any former student and graduate of UNL

*Conditional Admission:* Classification for students who meet academic requirements to enroll at UNL but have not demonstrated English proficiency to enter a degree program

*Full admission:* Classification for students who meet both academic and English proficiency requirements to enroll in their degree program at UNL

*Intensive English Program (IEP):* Academic program consisting of five levels of full-time, non-credit bearing English courses for conditionally admitted students with limited English proficiency

*Credit English for Academic Purposes (CEAP) English Bridge Program:* Academic program for conditionally admitted students with advanced proficiency consisting of three credit bearing English classes and one elective course

*Academic Degree Program:* Enrollment in regular academic program of study leading to the completion of a bachelor's degree

## **Significance**

Existing research on college choice focuses heavily on U.S. students and their decision to attend or not attend college as well as determinants in their choice in a particular institution. This study focused on the experience of undergraduate Chinese students as an individual and significant cohort of students at UNL. It attempted to understand how individuals in this specific group make decisions and the attributes that make UNL attractive to this population.

It is known that factors such as institutional ranking, the campus environment, cost and scholarships, as well as opportunities to develop skills useful in beginning a career are important to Chinese students (Boycott, 2009; Boycott & Lai, 2012; He & Bonham, 2011; Park, 2010; Simpson & Tan, 2009; Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007; Wang, 2007). This study hopes to build upon this knowledge by developing an understanding of what specific factors and people were influential to undergraduate Chinese students studying at UNL. As UNL sees an increase in undergraduate Chinese students it is important that it be prepared to provide services that meet expectations of incoming students (Whiteside, 2011). As a collaborative study with the Office of Admissions, this information may be used to adapt how UNL recruits undergraduate Chinese students. This information adds to the body of research on how universities similar to UNL in size and scope approach their recruitment efforts towards undergraduate Chinese students.

## **Limitations**

In any research on this topic, generalizing data has limited significance as this research is focused on one particular population of students at a particular institution and is not necessarily broadly applicable to all undergraduate Chinese students in the U.S.

Furthermore, cultural and linguistic barriers exist that may unintentionally undermine the intent of quantitative questions that were developed based on the literature review. The qualitative interview provided the opportunity for students to expand on their thoughts. Due to varying levels of English proficiency amongst the study population, students may have refrained from participating in the interview portion of the study due to language or cultural barriers.

The population of this study, Chinese undergraduates who were newly enrolled in fall 2014, is also limiting in scope as students arriving in fall 2014 may have completely different reasons for choosing UNL than students who have been enrolled for one or more years. This population was specifically chosen as they are in closest proximity to their decision to enroll at UNL and will have the least amount of influence or bias based on experiences as a student at UNL. New student data will also be of most use for the Office of Admission in evaluating recruitment programs designed to attract undergraduate Chinese students.

### **Assumptions**

Based on professional experiences and the literature review, the author conducted this study with a set of assumptions regarding why students select an institution at which to pursue their bachelor's degree. The author assumes that institutional rankings, cost, campus environment, and career opportunities as well as peers and family play a significant role in Chinese student choice. This study tests these assumptions while providing an opportunity for students to share other influencers and institutional characteristics that were significant in their decision making process.



## **Conclusion**

As more undergraduate Chinese students enroll at U.S. institutions more information is needed for institutions like UNL to understand how they can attract this diverse and dynamic student population. While these students lend diversity to institutions and generate revenue (Choudaha, 2011), more needs to be understood about Chinese student expectations as they conduct their university search and choose to enroll at a particular institution (Whiteside, 2011; Harper & Quaye, 2009). This study uses quantitative and qualitative research tools to develop this understanding amongst new undergraduate Chinese students at UNL.

In Chapter Two existing research is examined to develop an understanding of the process Chinese students go through as they choose a study abroad institution. It focuses on overall factors that impact student mobility as well as the influencers and institutional characteristics that sway students. Chapter Three provides a detailed description of the research methodology used to collect data including the quantitative survey instrument as well as the procedures used in the qualitative interview. Chapter Four reports findings from the study while Chapter Five discusses implications, suggests opportunities for further research and connects the results with the greater body of research being undertaken in the field of international student recruitment.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this research was to better understand why Chinese students choose the University of Nebraska–Lincoln for their undergraduate degree. There are currently over 235,000 Chinese students studying in the United States but current research is limited in its examination of these students and what specific factors attracted them to a particular institution (IIE, 2013). There is research that exists to suggest that the two primary drivers on the decision to choose an institution are influencers, or people who provide advice and assistance to students, and institutional characteristics that attract students to a particular type of institution. Within each of these factors, characteristics such as institutional rankings, cost, safety, and career prospects influence Chinese student choice (Bodycott, 2009; Bodycott & Lai, 2012; He & Bonham, 2011; Park, 2010; Simpson & Tan, 2009). This research attempted to understand what influence individuals and institutional characteristics have on the decision of undergraduate Chinese students to study at UNL.

#### **Introduction**

In this literature review a variety of literature is explored that will attempt to understand the people who influence student choice and the factors that impact influencers and students. Much literature exists exploring factors that influence the student decision-making process when deciding to pursue a bachelor's degree and for domestic student choice within the United States. This literature review narrows the focus to Chinese students who have already decided to pursue a bachelor's degree in the United

States. In addition to exploring factors important in the decision making process, the literature examines elements of the university experience in the United States in shaping Chinese student impressions of education in the United States.

The author's literature search utilized search engines such as Academic Search Premier, EBSCO Host, and ERIC to identify journals and peer reviewed articles on Chinese student choice. Terms used in the search included "international student choice," "Chinese student choice," "Chinese university choice," and "Chinese student education destination." Articles written after 2001 were prioritized as articles written after this period most accurately reflect changes in immigration policy after the events of September 11, 2001. Some findings from studies prior to 2001 remain relevant and were included as part of the research. The studies reviewed examined the topic through quantitative and qualitative frameworks in attempting to delve into the experience of Chinese student college choice. The results of the search led to studies that examined many variables in the process of Chinese student choice such as rankings, campus safety, and career prospects after graduation.

### **Influencers**

Prior to 2008, the impetus behind international student recruitment lay in the ability to attract talented students from other countries and to build a culturally diverse student body (Choudaha, 2011). The recession of 2008 made attracting international students a means of securing campus finances by generating revenue from additional markets outside of the traditional domestic student population (Choudaha, 2011). Since 2008, Chinese students have flocked to the United States (IIE, 2013). Driven by a growing college aged cohort and economically mobile middle class, Chinese students are

finding that China's higher education system does not have the capacity to handle the growing demand for higher education (Choudaha, 2011). As the one child policy has led to an increasing affluence amongst China's middle class, students have become more able and willing to earn their degree abroad making this an attractive market for U.S. institutions (Bartlett & Fischer, 2011; Johnson, 2011).

This research makes clear that a student's choice to study abroad is not merely about what is offered but also about who is involved in influencing their decision. Asian students tend to see more positive outcomes from this influence as family and peer relationships emphasize academic success more so than among other minority students in the United States (Massey, et al. 2003; Prado, 2008). Parental influence has deep roots in Confucian values and although parents may value different factors in choosing a foreign institution, this isn't necessarily an adversarial relationship (Bodycott & Lai, 2012).

As influencers in the college choice process, parents also have institutional characteristics in which they are interested. Bodycott and Lai (2012) found that parents are more interested in safety, job prospects, and opportunities to pursue graduate studies. In an earlier study, Bodycott (2009) found that students are more interested in what the campus has to offer while they are on campus. This begs the question as to the strength of parents in the choice of where students choose to study.

In order to work in the U.S. after graduation, Chinese students must obtain immigration documentation to enter the United States while further immigration regulations limit the ability of students to work during their studies or after completing a degree (Harper & Quaye, 2009). Although they have little impact on the policies regulating student visas and employment, institutions can develop an understanding of

the importance of familial expectations in career choices (Hwang & Heppner, 2001) and clearly communicate requirements for obtaining immigration documents in the recruitment process in an attempt to attract parents of prospective students.

The economic or social status of parents can also influence how students search for an institution overseas. There is evidence to suggest that parents are influenced by the ability to increase the economic and social status upon returning to China. Xiang and Shen (2009) argue that a foreign degree lends credibility in applying for jobs and helps strengthen cultural and social ties developed by students when overseas, impacting their ability to earn more money in career fields with international reach.

Additional influencers of students are educational agents who are paid to represent or serve as proxies to students in the college search process and provide support and advice (De Luca, 2010). The allure of agents to Chinese students can be tied to the seemingly overwhelming nature of the application, admission and visas processes of the United States (Bartlett & Fischer, 2011; Bohman, 2010; Nattavud, 2003; Wildavsky, 2011). According to Zhang & Hagedorn (2011), students are more likely to use an agent if they are younger, have weaker English skills and have parents with a lower level of education. Students who did not use agents were found to have felt more comfortable working through the admission process independently and tended to have taken the ACT or SAT whereas students who took the TOEFL or IELTS English proficiency exams were more likely to use the assistance of an agent.

Peer influence can have both positive and negative consequences as the peer group of a student can shape their ability to achieve academically (Coleman, 1961). Asian students tend to see more positive outcomes as family and peer relationships

emphasize academic success more so than among other minority students (Massey, et al. 2003; Prado, 2008). Bohman (2010) further found that students learned about particular universities through family or friends who had either previously attended the institution or who lived in the community where the institution was located. There is little additional research attempting to understand the role of peers and other influencers such as school teachers and high school guidance counselors on Chinese student choice. The methodology section addresses how this study attempted to better understand the relationship between these influencers and undergraduate Chinese student choice.

### **Institutional Characteristics**

Tinto (1993) frames the experience of minority students and their ability to succeed around attachment theory or the ability of institutions to develop interpersonal relationships with students. Whereas Chinese parents may be more interested in safety and career opportunities, what a university offers to students plays a larger role in the institutional characteristics students value (He & Bonham, 2011). Richard Whiteside (2011) aptly notes this will require universities to fundamentally change their organization perspectives to meet the needs of this new student body. For example, the process of adapting to a new culture is a multi-faceted experience encompassing education systems, interpersonal relationships, culinary tastes and social experiences such as shopping or navigating public transportation (Copland & Garton, 2011; Guo & Chase, 2010). On the domestic front, students have come to expect a high level of university support in the process of transitioning from secondary school to universities. When recruiting international students it is important that institutions keep in mind that these students require unique process and activities outlined by Verbik and Lasanowski (2007)

in order to orient them to their experience at institutions of higher education in the United States.

As institutions work to recruit Chinese students it is important that recruiters and student affairs professionals understand the factors that impact student decision-making and attempt to build a supportive campus atmosphere that helps assuage the concerns of students and parents. Attentive university staff and programs that support the integration of Chinese students on campus greatly benefits the ability of students to adapt to U.S. higher education (Guo & Chase, 2010; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2008; Tinto, 1993). Many concerns and frustrations shared by the students in Poyrazli and Grahame's study revolved around language barriers and lack of interaction with American students. Just as Tinto (1993) identified, support services were critical to the adjustment of these students in their new environment. The students in Tinto's (1993) study were clearly able to identify areas of concern that could be addressed by this particular institution once on campus that greatly differed from what students and parents may expect prior to arrival in the United States.

Although Verbik and Lasanowski (2007) focus on global trends, many of the institutional characteristics that were significant on the global scale are applicable to Chinese students. Factors such as long-term job prospects in addition to campus safety and international student services are also important to Chinese students as they pursue higher education in the United States (Bodycott, 2009; Boycott & Lai, 2012). Simpson and Tan (2009) challenge the notion that students and universities are in a buyer-seller relationship with students and that, in reality, the nature of this relationship is built on the ability of institutions to convey institutional quality and the value added experiences at a

particular institution. Park (2010) notes that foreign student's decision to attend a particular university abroad is based on a market analysis that rewards institutions with a stronger global brand achieved through marketing strategies that emphasize success through measureable matrices such as program or institutional rankings.

In a study of key factors to increasing international recruitment within higher education, Wang (2007) identified environmental concerns, i.e. living arrangements as playing a vital role in the process of Chinese students selecting an institution abroad. For students coming from a different country and culture, living arrangements can be a defining characteristic of the overseas experience. In interviews conducted with students and parents Wang (2007) found that having a safe living environment that respected the cultural values of Chinese students was critical in the selection process for Chinese students.

In addition to the economic, social and cultural capital of parents, the ability to develop capital has also been shown to impact a student's decision to study overseas in regards to graduate school and career prospects after graduation (Xiang, & Shen, 2009). Linguistic skills, manner of dress and cultural norms in China have little value in overcoming the barriers in social interaction when Chinese students first arrive to begin their studies in the United States (Copland & Garton, 2011; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2008; Yakunina, Weigold, & McCarthy, 2011). Attentive university staff and programs that support the integration and development of capital of these students on campus greatly benefit their ability to adapt to U.S. higher education making an institution more attractive to Chinese students (Guo & Chase, 2010; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Tinto,



1993). These factors can be framed in the size of the institution and the ability of a particular institution to spend time focusing on individual campus populations.

In focus group interviews of 15 international students on a commuter campus in the United States, Poyrazli & Grahame (2008) identified five areas of concern for international students: orientation, communication, housing, social interactions and academic life. These factors allow students to build social, economic and cultural capital necessary to add value to their experience and privileges over a lifetime of experiences and increase job prospects by lending credibility when applying for jobs in China (Bourdieu, 2011/1986; Xiang, & Shen, 2009). Conversely, the economic background of students can significantly impact where they choose to study as tuition and scholarship are more important to middle class students while safety, climate, city size, and the type of institution (public or private) were of lesser value to all students (He & Bonham, 2011).

## **Conclusion**

The research examined in this literature review makes clear that the two primary components of undergraduate Chinese student choice of institution are influencers and institutional characteristics. Furthermore it suggests that institutional size and its ability to meet needs of specific groups on campus is important. When recruiting students this means being able to effectively communicate these items to students. Chapter Three provides a detailed description of the research methodology applied to new undergraduate Chinese students at UNL to attempt to understand what factors were most influential in their decision to study at UNL.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

This chapter discusses, in detail, the methodology as well as justification for the use of quantitative and qualitative tools in gathering data. Techniques used for each data instrument are explained to provide a concise understanding of the data collection process. Previous research discussed in Chapter Two is related in terms of how current research questions were developed and applied to this population at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this research was to better understand why Chinese students choose the University of Nebraska–Lincoln for their undergraduate degree. There are currently over 235,000 Chinese students studying in the United States but current research is limited in its examination of these students and what specific factors attracted them to a particular institution (IIE, 2013). There is research that exists to suggest that the two primary drivers on the decision to choose an institution are influencers, or people who provide advice and assistance to students, and institutional characteristics that attract students to a particular type of institution. Within each of these factors, characteristics such as institutional rankings, cost, safety, and career prospects influence Chinese student choice (Bodycott, 2009; Bodycott & Lai, 2012; He & Bonham, 2011; Park, 2010; Simpson & Tan, 2009). This research attempted to understand what influence individuals and institutional characteristics have on the decision of undergraduate Chinese students to study at UNL.

**Reflexivity Statement**

Before proceeding it is prudent to note that the author is a paid staff member at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln in the Office of Admissions. As I am responsible for recruiting international students to UNL, many if not all of the Chinese students on campus know who I am through email marketing materials that contain my name and picture. As an admissions officer I regularly interact with perspective and current Chinese students. My personal and professional experiences working with prospective students from China have taught me to be patient with students and colleagues as we all navigate new academic, professional and cultural experiences. This includes refraining from making cultural assumptions based on my own personal experiences. With one billion people living in China, it cannot be assumed that the values and expectations that students have of a university will be uniform across this diverse population. My research of Chinese student decision making must be careful to understand that the results of Chinese students at UNL must not be broadly assumed across the entire Chinese population or even the entire population of Chinese students at UNL.

In my research, Chinese students are of the most interest to me as they are emerging as the fastest growing cohort of international students on UNL's campus (University of Nebraska–Lincoln, 2014). I am particularly interested in their decision making process and what factors impacted their choice to study at UNL. I take great joy in recruiting students to UNL but also hold great reverence for the decision making process of students and their families to attend a school in a foreign country, often in a second language. This is an experience that few of us will ever know in earnest and it is not something I take lightly.

I also recognize that I hold a bias in the need to meet recruitment goals and the fact that I travel to China annually. The 2020 enrollment goals have created a mandate to increase the international enrollment by 1,000 students; many of which will be Chinese (Perlman, 2011). This professional goal clearly influenced the body of my research and how I choose to pursue research questions with Chinese students. I have had to remain vigilant in recognizing when my research is driving my conclusions and when I am imposing conclusions based on current recruitment activities for which I am responsible.

Additionally, I strived not to let my personal perceptions of China drive my expectations keeping in mind that much of my travel to China is situated in two very distinct cities that present very different perspectives on Chinese life and culture. The primary objective of these trips is to interact with students from two partnerships programs where students receive support from Chinese and American staff and have the academic background and financial means to study at UNL. By suppressing my bias and engaging in meaningful thought driven by the experience of Chinese students at UNL, I tried to better understand their decision making process and their choice to study at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

### **Research Questions**

The literature examined in Chapter Two provides evidence to support the researcher's assumption that influencers and institutional characteristics are highly influential in an undergraduate Chinese student's choice in higher education institutions. The research questions are designed to understand the specific impact of those influencers and institutional characteristics on student choice to attend UNL. Past research has looked at the student choice experience prior to enrolling in the context of

small institutions, community colleges, and commuter campuses in the U.S. as well as the experience of using educational agents in the college search process (Bohman, 2010; De Luca, 2010; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2008; Zhang & Hagedorn, 2011) The following research questions will examine the Chinese student choice within the context of a large, four-year research institution located in the Midwest region of the United States.

Research questions examined are:

1. What factors were most influential in your decision to study at UNL?
2. What people were most influential in your decision to study at UNL?
3. In what ways did you communicate with UNL prior to enrolling?
4. How did you first hear about UNL?

### **A Mixed Methods Approach**

Mixed methods research involves the use of quantitative and qualitative instruments to collect data (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009). The intent of the mixed methods approach is to gain a deeper understanding of data results by providing an opportunity to collect data that creates consensus or alternatives that would not otherwise emerge when using a single research instrument (Mertens, 2010). In this study a quantitative survey was sent to students followed by an invitation to participate in individual interviews where students had the opportunity to express their opinions and share insights based on their own experience in choosing to enroll at UNL. This approach utilizes parallel mixed methods design used to collect quantitative and qualitative data to answer the research questions only a short lag time between data collection (Onwuegbuzie & Teddie, 2002).

Quantitative instruments are useful as they are typically inexpensive, easy to distribute to a large sample of anonymous respondents and allow researchers to collect a large quantity of data (Mertens, 2010). As will be demonstrated later in this chapter, items from existing data collection instruments were used in developing a new instrument specifically designed to understand who influences Chinese students attending UNL in addition to what institutional characteristics had an impact on their decision to study at UNL.

The goal of the qualitative interview is to understand the subjective experience of Chinese students in selecting UNL for their undergraduate institution by allowing them to answer open-ended questions that begin very general then become more specific as participants share their experiences (Mertens, 2010). This approach allows undergraduate Chinese students at UNL to share their opinions while allowing the researcher to test multiple hypotheses as to the importance of influencers and institutional characteristics. This approach also allows the researcher to provide a deep level of analysis when combined with the results of the quantitative instrument.

### **Research Population**

The population examined in this study were all undergraduate Chinese students who first enrolled in UNL during the fall term beginning in August 2014 (N = 312). This population consisted of both freshmen and transfer students who were enrolled in any academic program at UNL. New students were chosen as the population for this research as they were closest in proximity to their decision to select UNL and would be less likely to be biased by their experience as a student. This population also reflected the most

current and economic realities that impact students' decision making (He & Bonham, 2011).

Following Institutional Research Board (IRB) approval, the Office of the University Registrar provided email addresses of students in the population who were sent a recruitment message and link to a survey by the author's thesis advisor. Students were asked to provide basic demographic information as well as information regarding their academic level, whether they live on campus, and in which academic program they were enrolled. Three days after the initial message was sent, students were sent a follow up message asking them to complete the survey.

### **Research Site**

This study was conducted during the spring 2015 term beginning in January 2015 and ending in May 2015. Total enrollment for the fall 2014 term at UNL was 25,006 (University of Nebraska, 2014). Total undergraduate enrollment was 19,979 with 727 undergraduate Chinese students. The study population represents 43% of the undergraduate Chinese students on campus and 1.2% of total students enrolled at UNL.

### **Institutional Review Board Approval**

Prior to recruitment or data collection of human subjects the researcher completed the required Consortium for Institutional Review Board (IRB) Training Initiative in Human Subjects Protections (CITI) mandated by the Office of Research Responsibility. After completing the online courses to receive the CITI certificate the researcher submitted an application to conduct research using human subjects through UNL's Institutional Research Board (IRB). This application included completion of the IRB application and submitting the quantitative survey recruitment message (Appendix A),

the qualitative interview recruitment message (Appendix C), informed consent documents for both the quantitative instrument and qualitative survey (Appendix D & Appendix E), a letter of cooperation from the Office of Admissions (Appendix H), a letter of cooperation from the Office of the University Registrar (Appendix I), the quantitative survey questions (Appendix F) and the qualitative interview questions (Appendix G). All documents in addition to the IRB letter of approval can be found in the Appendix.

### **Research Process**

Once IRB approval was obtained, the researcher contacted the Office of the University Registrar, which sent a list of emails to the researcher's thesis advisor to distribute the quantitative recruitment message in February of the spring term. In the recruitment message students were asked to complete an online survey that would take less than five minutes to complete. Three days after the initial message was sent, a follow-up recruitment message was sent. Each message contained an incentive to be entered into a drawing for one of two \$25 gift cards to the University Book Store. Students who wished to be included in the drawing were instructed to email the researcher's thesis advisor. Those students were excluded from further recruitment messages. The recruitment messages contained a hyperlink to the survey that was hosted online using the Qualtrics survey research tool. Prior to beginning the survey, students were asked to read and electronically sign an informed consent document that was required to proceed to the survey.

Three weeks after the initial recruitment message was sent for the quantitative instrument, the researcher's thesis advisor sent a recruitment message to students inviting



them to participate in the individual interview. This was sent to all students who had responded to the initial survey and entered their name in the drawing for one of two gift cards. Students were incentivized to attend with dinner that was provided by the researcher. The interviews took place in a private room on campus. Prior to the beginning of the focus group, students signed another informed consent document. More detail on the two research instruments is provided in the following sections.

### **Quantitative Survey**

To address the research questions a quantitative survey was developed using Qualtrics, an online survey and reporting tool, to collect data on items that were deemed of importance through prior research outlined in the literature review. The first four questions addressed demographic characteristics of participants. The first two questions asked participants to identify their gender and whether they were a freshman student or if they had transferred to UNL from another university. The third question addressed whether or not they lived off campus as a measure of independence which, with other data collected, could be used to validate the findings of Zhang and Hagedorn (2011) regarding the use of agents and student independence.

The fourth question addresses the level of academic program at UNL, which would in turn provide a measure of the level of English proficiency of participants. The programs in which UNL students are admitted have specific English language scores required for admission, which provides the researcher with a measure of proficiency that would be useful in correlating response to other items. The fifth question asks respondents to identify the number of institutions to which they applied during their college search process.

Question six utilized a Likert scale where participants are asked to measure their attitudes towards a series of items by indicating the strength of influence on a five-point scale ranging from “Not at all Important” to “Very Important” (Michie, 2000). The attitudes being measured within this item focus on institutional characteristics students found most influential. The first item asks students to rate the importance of “Availability of Academic Scholarships” which measures the unique nature of programs designed for international students (Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007) and the impact of economic incentives on institutional choice (He & Bonham, 2011). The second item, “Cost of Tuition” is also designed to provide a measure of economic factors in the decision making process which is critical to middle class Chinese students (He & Bonham, 2011).

Institutional experiences (Copland & Garton, 2011; Guo & Chase, 2010), attentiveness of university staff towards students (Guo & Chase, 2010; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2008; Tinto, 1993) and living arrangements (Wang, 2007) have also been deemed significant factors for Chinese students. These factors are captured in the item, “Availability of On-Campus Housing.” This also measures institutional quality in offering student opportunities on campus, which was validated as an important aspect of Chinese student decision making (Simpson & Tan, 2009). Additional items measuring quality include, “Safety on Campus,” “University Rankings,” “Academic Programs,” and “Size of UNL.” An item measuring institutional rankings was also included as Chinese students favor stronger global brands in their university search (Park, 2010).

In addition to experiences and the quality of those experiences and facilities on campus, environmental concerns and the ability to develop economic capital are also important and closely related topics of influence in Chinese student choice (Bourdieu,

2011/1976; Bodycott, 2009; Boycott & Lai, 2012; Xiang, & Shen, 2009; Wang, 2007). Items used to measure environment quality and experiences include, “Safety in Lincoln,” “Location in the U.S.,” “Size of UNL,” and “Size of Lincoln.” Economic capital development and long term success are measured through, “Career Opportunities,” and “Graduate School Opportunities.”

The next question addresses the influencers who played a significant role in the participants’ decision to study at UNL. For Chinese students, family and peer networks play a significant role in their success and these people certainly play a role in many areas of a young Chinese student’s life (Massey, et al. 2003; Prado, 2008; Bodycott & Lai, 2012). To measure this influence in the decision to study at UNL participants are asked to rate the influence of, “Parents,” “Friends in China,” “Friends already studying at UNL,” and “Friends at other universities in the United States.”

Bohman (2010) notes that the peer network of students who have previously attended a university are also influential. To measure this, the item, “UNL Alumni,” was also included. As noted in Chapter Two, very little research exists on the role or influence of teachers, guidance counselors, or other individuals outside of the family and peer networks. To measure the influence of these external individuals the following items were included; “Teacher at your School in China,” “Academic Counselor at your School in China,” and “UNL Staff Member.” A question on the use of agents was also included as Zhang and Hagedorn (2011) note the significant factors related to student use of an agent such as socioeconomic background, English proficiency level, and parental education. The final two questions are aimed at understanding how students communicated with UNL and how they first heard about UNL in an attempt to better

understand the communication process of these students as well as how communication was first initiated with UNL.

### **Limitations of the Quantitative Instrument**

The quantitative instrument specifically does not ask students to identify their country of origin as all student contact information provided by the Office of the University Registrar required students to have an official citizenship of China. This limited delineation between Chinese citizens who undertook the college choice process in China versus those who may have lived and experienced the college search process from another country. The research does not examine from which geographic region of China respondents lived or whether they lived in a rural or metropolitan setting. Furthermore, the study is not able to distinguish between students who have only previously studied in China from those who had undertaken education in the United States as part of their high school experience or those who had transferred from another institution within the United States. Students are also not asked to identify their socioeconomic status due to the cultural subjectivity of the question as well as the fact that students had to show a minimum of \$39,343 prior to obtaining immigration documentation from UNL. Questions on cost of tuition and housing as well as scholarship availability are designed to measure the importance of economic impacts on the decision making process.

A major focus of this research is understanding the influence family, peers, teachers, and others had in the process of participants' choice to study at UNL. A more in-depth study could also include focus groups of influencers to determine how they would rank institutional characteristics in deciding how they exerted their influence. As many of these individuals reside overseas, a study of this undertaking would be very time

consuming and outside the scope of what the researcher is able to accomplish in this particular research project.

Another limitation in this component of the research is that the quantitative instrument was not made available to students in a language other than English. Although every effort was made to use terms students would understand as part of the common admission jargon, survey responses from students who were not fully admitted to their degree program may have suffered as they were not able to complete the survey in their native language. The cost and time necessary to translate the materials from English to Mandarin and then translating response from Mandarin to English made this prohibitive within the scope of this study.

### **Qualitative Interviews**

To further understand how Chinese students at UNL determined they would enroll at UNL individual interviews were conducted with students who had previously completed the quantitative survey. Students who had submitted their names and contact information to be included in the drawing for the gift cards were invited to participate in individual interviews where the researcher would provide dinner for participants.

Questions were designed based on the characteristics and influencers identified in Chapter Two and used for data collection in the quantitative instrument. This allowed students to address the same survey items in the quantitative instrument delivered in an open ended manner, sharing their ideas as the researcher probed for more specific answers.

The survey was conducted under the following format:

**Part 1: Explanation of Survey**

Participants were asked to sit at a table across from the researcher. The researcher then attempted to establish rapport with participants by sharing purpose of the interview, credentials and other relevant information. It was made clear to participants that their answers would remain anonymous and they were free to end the interview at any time if they became uncomfortable.

**Part 2: Informed Consent**

After the purpose of the research was explained the participants read and signed an informed consent allowing them to participate in the interview.

**Part 3: Interview Questions**

Interview questions matched the items from the quantitative survey but were asked in an open ended manner that allowed for students to share personal stories and anecdotes and in a way in which the researcher was able to probe answers to test several hypotheses and ensure that understanding is achieved prior to moving to the next question. Participants were given the opportunity to add to their answers before moving on and questions were structure from general to more specific. Answers were summarized to ensure they were appropriately represented in the researcher's notes and participants were often asked to give more perspective to their experience by sharing examples.

**Part 4: Concluding the Interview**

After all questions had been addressed the researcher summarized responses and gave participants an opportunity to add any additional information or clarity to previous responses. The purpose of the research and use of the data was explained again and

participants were ensured that no personally identifiable information would be used as part of the final results. Participants were thanked when leaving and a letter of thanks for participating was sent.

### **Limitations of the Qualitative Survey**

As with the quantitative instrument, language barriers may have influenced the number of participants who chose to attend the individual interviews. The sample may not have accurately represented the population as it may have contained students with a higher level of English proficiency and was very small.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis of the quantitative data began prior to the collection of qualitative data, as the quantitative data did not impact the formation or structure of the qualitative interviews. Using Qualtrics, SPSS, and Microsoft Excel, quantitative data was analyzed for frequency of demographic questions. Correlation and frequency analyses were performed on the remaining items related to the research questions which are reported in Chapter 4.

After collecting qualitative data, responses to interview questions were included with quantitative results to help build context around those findings. The following chapter reports the findings of both the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

This chapter reports the findings of the research questions and outcomes as they relate to the previously reviewed literature and research findings. This section examines the results of the quantitative instrument and qualitative surveys and describes the results of each. Each instrument was designed to address all four research questions.

The purpose of this research is to better understand why Chinese students choose the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL) for their undergraduate degree. The results assist in developing a better understanding of which specific institutional characteristics as well as individuals influence Chinese student choice as these factors have been found to be significant in this decision making process (Massey, et al. 2003; Prado, 2008; Bodycott & Lai, 2012; Simpson & Tan, 2009 Bodycott, 2009; He & Bonham, 2011; Park, 2010; Simpson & Tan, 2009). This mixed methods study captures the student choice experience through survey responses as well as individual interviews with three students to develop a deeper understanding of their personal experience.

The following research questions explored in this study provide a framework for reporting and understanding the results provided by first year undergraduate Chinese students at UNL.

1. What factors were most influential in your decision to study at UNL?
2. What people were most influential in your decision to study at UNL?
3. In what ways did you communicate with UNL prior to enrolling?
4. How did you first hear about UNL?



## Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The population of this study focused on first-year Chinese undergraduate students who had enrolled as first-time students at UNL. This designation included both freshmen and transfer students as well as students who were enrolled in UNL's Intensive English Program, Credit English for Academic Purposes English bridge program or who were fully enrolled in their degree program.

In the initial quantitative survey, 312 students were sent an invitation to participate by providing anonymous responses to items that included all four research questions. Of the total study population, responses were submitted by a sample size of  $n = 36$  with 25 students completing all survey items. This sample represents 11.5% of the total study population ( $N = 312$ ) of first-year undergraduate Chinese students. Compared to UNL's total student population, the gender demographics of the sample match the overall demographics of all students (UNL, 2014). Of first year students, transfer students were disproportionally represented within this sample accounting for 60% of responses compared to just 17% of all total new students. The sample for this survey were also disproportionate in term of those living on campus with 92% of the sample reporting they live on campus compared to 40% of all UNL students. Of additional note, 84% of respondents were fully admitted to their degree program and possessed the necessary English skills to bypass additional language training at UNL. Demographic information on the sample group is included in Table 1.

In addition to demographic data, additional information is included about the academic program level and number of institutions to which students applied to better

Table 1

*Demographic Characteristics*

	n	%
Gender		
Male	13	52
Female	12	48
Student Status		
Freshmen	10	40
Transfer	15	60
Housing Status		
On-Campus	23	92
Off-Campus	2	8
Program Level		
Intensive English Program	1	4
Credit English for Academic Purposes	3	12
Academic Degree Program	21	84
Number of Institutions Applied To		
1-3	19	76
4-6	6	24

understand how those variables interacted with the institutional factors and individuals who influenced Chinese student choice.

After completing the quantitative instrument students were invited to submit their names and contact information if they wished to be contacted about participating in the qualitative interview. Of the 25 participants, only eight responded that they were interested in participating in the qualitative survey and of those eight, only three responded to the personal interview invitation. All three students fully participated in

personal interviews ranging in time from 45-60 minutes. Students who participated in the personal interview had similar demographic characteristics as survey participants. Of the three participants, one was male and two were female and all three were fully enrolled in their degree program and did not participate in any formal language training prior to enrolling in their academic courses. Of these participants two lived on campus and all three were transfer students.

### **Research Question 1: Institutional characteristics in decision making**

To understand which institutional characteristics were important in the decision making of undergraduate Chinese students, the researcher asked participants to rank thirteen items based on the level of importance they played in the decision to study at UNL. Of the 36 respondents who started the survey, 25 completed all questions. All participants who did not complete abandoned the survey after the informed consent question with eight participants indicating that they consented to proceed but then chose not to continue. One student indicated that they did not consent while three did not answer and were not allowed to proceed. Included in Table 2 are percent distributions, means and standard deviations for respondents.

As noted in Table 2, the majority of participants indicated they were neutral or felt the factors were somewhat or very important in their decision making. Safety on campus and safety in the city of Lincoln each had the highest percent of respondents indicating that those characteristics were very important with 64% each.

Safety on campus achieved the highest sample mean with 3.88. "Availability of Academic Scholarships" also garnered a high level of participants indicating "Very Important" with 52%. Participants indicated the highest level of importance for both

Table 2

## Percent Distributions of University Characteristics

#	Question	N	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Neither Important or Unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Not at all Important	$\bar{X}$	SD
1	Availability of Academic Scholarships	25	52%	24%	12%	8%	4%	4.12	1.166
2	Cost of Tuition	25	40%	28%	24%	8%	0%	4.00	1.000
3	Availability of on-campus housing	25	28%	32%	24%	12%	4%	3.68	1.145
4	Cost of on-campus housing	25	28%	52%	4%	12%	4%	3.88	1.092
5	Safety on campus	25	64%	28%	4%	4%	0%	4.52	.770
6	Safety in the city of Lincoln	25	64%	28%	0%	8%	0%	4.48	.872
7	Location of the university in the United States	25	4%	32%	48%	8%	8%	3.16	.943
8	University rankings	25	24%	52%	16%	0%	8%	3.84	1.068
9	Career opportunities	25	28%	24%	36%	8%	4%	3.64	1.114
10	Graduate school opportunities	25	40%	36%	12%	8%	4%	4.00	1.118
11	Academic program	25	24%	48%	16%	4%	8%	3.76	1.128
12	Size of UNL	25	8%	32%	40%	12%	8%	3.20	1.041
13	Size of Lincoln, NE	25	8%	20%	48%	16%	8%	3.04	1.020

“Cost of Tuition” and “Graduate School Opportunities” with 40% selecting “Very Important” for each variable.

During individual interviews all three interview participants indicated that safety was important to them but was of much more importance to their parents. For two

participants, cost was a significant factor since their families would be supporting them and scholarship availability was very important. As one participant described:

“Non-resident tuition is very expensive even though UNL’s tuition is much lower than other schools. Scholarships were very beneficial for my family and important to me.”

Items of lesser importance to participants include the “Size of UNL” ( $\bar{X} = 3.2$ ) the “Size of Lincoln” ( $\bar{X} = 3.04$ ) and the “Location of the University within the United States” ( $\bar{X} = 3.16$ ). Overall, the geographic location of the university and the size of Lincoln also received the most apathetic responses with 48% of participants identifying those characteristics as “Neither Important or Unimportant”. This was also true for all three interview participants.

The item with the largest standard deviation was “Availability of Campus Housing” ( $\sigma = 1.145$ ). It is notable that no more than 8% of respondents to any given item indicated that any factor was “Not at all Important”. In fact, “Cost of Tuition,” “Safety on Campus,” and “Safety in the City of Lincoln” had no respondents indicate that those items were “Not at all Important”.

In order to understand how these items were related to and interacted with one another, the research compared the variables in question to each other using a multivariate correlation. The results of the correlations appear in Table 3 below. Among university characteristics, several significant relationships existed among the variables. One of the strongest correlations amongst all variables existed between “Career Opportunities” and “Graduate Opportunities” ( $r = .803$ ,  $n = 25$ ,  $p < .01$ , two tails). A one value increase in the importance of either variable led to an almost one

Table 3

*Correlations between University Characteristics**(n = 25)*

	Academic Scholarships	Cost of Tuition	Availability of on-campus housing	Cost of on-campus housing	Safety on campus	Safety in the city of Lincoln	Location of the university in the United States	University rankings	Career opportunities	Graduate school opportunities	Academic program	Size of UNL	Size of Lincoln, NE
Availability of Academic Scholarships	....	.750**	.561**	.666**	.299	.310	.474*	.551**	.708**	.767**	.529**	.288	.101
Cost of Tuition	.750**	....	.328	.648**	.379	.430*	.353	.351	.486*	.522**	.443*	.200	.041
Availability of on-campus housing	.561**	.328	....	.701**	.527**	.411*	.590**	.331	.560**	.488*	.293	.441*	.047
Cost of on-campus housing	.666**	.648**	.701**	....	.523**	.588**	.262	.269	.545**	.546**	.178	.352	-.108
Safety on campus	.299	.379	.527**	.523**	....	.854**	.397*	.409*	.227	.145	.293	.281	.185
Safety in the city of Lincoln	.310	.430*	.411*	.588**	.854**	....	.308	.489*	.314	.342	.376	.303	.212
Location of the university in the United States	.474*	.353	.590**	.262	.397*	.308	....	.564**	.573**	.553**	.507**	.433*	.426*
University rankings	.551**	.351	.331	.269	.409*	.489*	.564**	....	.721**	.768**	.762**	.367	.389
Career opportunities	.708**	.486*	.560**	.545**	.227	.314	.573**	.721**	....	.803**	.492*	.388	.197
Graduate school opportunities	.767**	.522**	.488*	.546**	.145	.342	.553**	.768**	.803**	....	.628**	.465*	.219
Academic program	.529**	.443*	.293	.178	.293	.376	.507**	.762**	.492*	.628**	....	.468*	.516**
Size of UNL	.288	.200	.441*	.352	.281	.303	.433*	.367	.388	.465*	.468*	....	.581**
Size of Lincoln, NE	.101	.041	.047	-.108	.185	.212	.426*	.389	.197	.219	.516**	.581**	....

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

value increase in the other. The variable “Graduate Opportunities” had the most statistically significant relationships with nine total, the strongest being with “Career Opportunities” and the weakest being with “Size of UNL” ( $r = .465, n = 25, p < .05$ , two tails).

Among interview participants “Graduate Opportunities” seemed to be more of an afterthought than an important factor. One participant did not originally intend to pursue an undergraduate degree in the United States. Their intention was to complete their undergraduate degree in China and then come to the United States for graduate school. They did not consider coming to UNL until they were encouraged to study abroad by a faculty member at their school in China. Another participant did not plan to go to graduate school after completing their undergraduate degree while the third student saw studying in the United States during their undergraduate degree as beneficial to graduate school opportunities. The third respondent indicated they could have done that from many different schools and that it was not of high importance in their choice to study at UNL.

Among survey participants, strong positive relationships existed amongst nine variable correlations. For instance, “Academic Scholarships” and “Cost of Tuition” had a strong positive relationship ( $r = .750, n = 25, p < .01$ , two tails) suggesting that the more important Chinese undergraduate students considered scholarships in their decision making process, the more importance they placed on tuition. A strong positive relationship also existed between “Safety on Campus” and “Safety in the city

of Lincoln” ( $r = .854, n = 25, p < .01$ , two tails). Although positive relationships existed between financial variables and safety variables, the relationships were mostly weak and never significant. The exception was “Safety on Campus” and “Cost of On-Campus Housing” which showed a moderate positive relationship ( $r = .523, n = 25, p < .01$ , two tails.) This result suggests that participants consider these items separately as the financial and safety variables received a high level of importance in their overall rating.

The variable for “Location of the University in the United States” also had nine significant relationships but most were only moderately strong which is not surprising as 48% all survey respondents ranked this variable as “Neither Important or Unimportant”. All three interview participants indicated that they hadn’t considered UNL’s geographic location in their choice to come to UNL. “Academic Program” also had a high number of significant correlations but most were weak aside from the relationship with “University Rankings” ( $r = .762, n = 25, p < .01$ , two tails).

Survey respondents tended to tie “University Rankings” with “Graduate School Opportunities,” “Career Opportunities” and the “Academic Program” variables indicating that those who thought rankings were more important put more significance in their academic and future opportunities. One interview participant indicated that overall institutional rankings were of less value than program specific rankings, which were important to them in verifying the quality of the institution.

The variables with the weakest relationships to any other variables were “Size of UNL” and “Size of Lincoln, NE” indicating that Chinese undergraduate students



place little interest in these variables compared to the other institutional characteristics. For each of these variables 60% of respondents indicated that they were “Neither Important or Unimportant”, “Somewhat Unimportant or Not at all Important”. The only negative relationship existed between “Size of Lincoln, NE” and “Cost of On-Campus Housing” although the relationship was not significant and very weak ( $r = -.108, n = 25$ ).

### **Research Question 2: Influential People in Decision-Making**

In Question 2 survey respondents and interview participants were asked to identify the influence of nine people or types of people and the importance of their influence in their decision to study at UNL. Included in Table 4 are percent distributions, means and standard deviations of this item for survey respondents.

The individuals identified by survey respondents with the highest sample mean were “Parents” ( $\bar{X} = 3.72$ ), followed by “Academic Counselor at your School in China” ( $\bar{X} = 3.40$ ), “Educational Agents” ( $\bar{X} = 3.24$ ), and “Friends Already Studying at UNL” ( $\bar{X} = 3.20$ ). The variable with the highest number of participants indicating that it was “Very Important” was “Parent” with 40% but this item also had the largest standard deviation of all items at  $\sigma = 1.400$  meaning it had the largest variation of any variable for Question 2.

As opposed to the variables in the first research question, the standard deviations were much higher indicating a wider dispersion and less agreement among participants as to the importance of each item. For instance, “Availability of On-Campus Housing” had the largest standard deviation of all items on the first research

Table 4

## Percent Distributions of Influencers

#	Question	N	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Neither Important or Unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Not at all Important	$\bar{X}$	SD
1	Parents	25	40%	24%	16%	8%	12%	3.72	1.400
2	Friends in China	25	8%	16%	28%	24%	24%	2.60	1.258
3	Friends already studying at UNL	25	20%	20%	32%	16%	12%	3.20	1.291
4	Friends at other universities in the USA	25	12%	24%	20%	24%	20%	2.84	1.344
5	Teacher at your school in China	25	8%	24%	32%	8%	28%	2.76	1.332
6	Academic counselor at your school in China	25	24%	28%	24%	12%	12%	3.40	1.323
7	UNL staff member	25	36%	16%	20%	16%	12%	3.08	1.320
8	UNL Alumni	25	8%	32%	20%	24%	16%	2.92	1.256
9	Educational Agent	25	20%	24%	28%	16%	12%	3.24	1.300

questions ( $\sigma = 1.145$ ). The lowest standard deviation for the second research question was for the variable “UNL Alumni” ( $\sigma = 1.256$ ). The largest was “Parents” ( $\sigma = 1.400$ ).

The individuals identified by survey respondents with the highest sample mean were “Parents” ( $\bar{X} = 3.72$ ), followed by “Academic Counselor at your School in China” ( $\bar{X} = 3.40$ ), “Educational Agents” ( $\bar{X} = 3.24$ ), and “Friends Already Studying at UNL” ( $\bar{X} = 3.20$ ). The variable with the highest number of participants indicating that it was “Very Important” was “Parent” with 40% but this item also had the largest standard deviation of all items ( $\sigma = 1.400$ ) meaning it had the largest variation of any variable for Question 2.

As opposed to the variables in the first research question, the standard deviations were much higher indicating a wider dispersion and less agreement among participants as to the importance of each item. For instance, “Availability of On-Campus Housing” had the largest standard deviation of all items on the first research question ( $\sigma = 1.145$ ). The lowest standard deviation for the second research question was for the variable “UNL Alumni” ( $\sigma = 1.256$ ). The largest was “Parents” ( $\sigma = 1.400$ ).

As with Question 1, the researcher also ran a correlation analysis of the survey data to develop a deeper understand of how these variables interacted with one another. The results of the correlation analysis are shown in Table 5.

When compared to the correlation analysis for the first research questions, the number of significant variables is much lower. Although the relationships are positive for the most part, the strength of relationships is not as strong as those from the previous questions. The data for this sample clearly indicate that students are getting their information from multiple sources and often a combination of these sources impacted their decision to study at UNL.

Table 5

*Correlations between Influential People in Decision Making**(n = 25)*

	Parents	Friends in China	Friends already studying at UNL	Friends at other universities in the USA	Teacher at your school in China	Academic counselor at your school in China	UNL staff member	UNL Alumni	Educational Agent
Parents	....	.383	.355	.352	.141	.153	.148	.129	-.099
Friends in China	.383	....	.641**	.601**	.463*	.250	.547**	.427*	.138
Friends already studying at UNL	.355	.641**	....	.716**	.320	.220	.528**	.422*	.094
Friends at other universities in the USA	.352	.601**	.716**	....	.373	.272	.594**	.560**	.261
Teacher at your school in China	.141	.463*	.320	.373	....	.553**	.699**	.586**	.564**
Academic counselor at your school in China	.153	.250	.220	.272	.553**	....	.744**	.647**	.499*
UNL staff member	.148	.547**	.528**	.594**	.699**	.744**	....	.884**	.644**
UNL Alumni	.129	.427*	.422*	.560**	.586**	.647**	.884**	....	.701**
Educational Agent	-.099	.138	.094	.261	.564**	.499*	.644**	.701**	....

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The strongest correlation existed between “UNL Staff Member” and “UNL Alumni” which had a significant and strong positive correlation ( $r = .884$ ,  $n = 25$ ,  $p < .01$ , two tails). In fact, “UNL Staff Member” had a positive and statistically significant relationship with all other variables aside from “Parents.” The participants’ responses seem to indicate a certain level of credibility between UNL staff members and their peers and teachers although it cannot be determined in which

direction the credibility is generated or received solely based on the survey responses to Question 2.

For instance, as the importance of “Friends at other Universities in the United States” increases so does the importance of the influence of “UNL Staff Member” ( $r = .591, n = 25, p < .01, \text{two tails}$ ). Furthermore, a similar pattern is seen among influencers who are authoritative academic figures to the students while still in China. When comparing “UNL Staff Member” with “Academic Counselor at your School in China,” the importance of each variable increases in a strong positive direction ( $r = .744, n = 25, p < .01, \text{two tails}$ ). This result exists for all variables measuring the influence of peers and academic authorities when correlated with the influence of UNL staff members in the decision make process of students in this sample. This was also similar to the results for “UNL Alumni” which may share a similar relationship of credibility.

In comparing influence of peers and that of academic authority figures in China the results indicate that participants separated the influence of those variables in their decision to study at UNL. The variables “Teachers and Your School in China” had a moderately strong but significant relationship with “Academic Counselors at your School in China” ( $r = .553, n = 25, p < .01, \text{two tails}$ ). Similar results occurred when comparing both of those variables with “Educational Agent.” The results for peer influence share similar results and have only moderate to weak positive relationships when correlated to variables representing academic authorities in China.

When looking at the importance of the influence of “Parents” no relationships had more than a weak positive relationship with “Educational Agent” having a weak negative relationship ( $r = -.099, n = 25$ ). This may indicate that parents hold a unique role in the decision making process as it was clearly an important variable in the decision making process of the participants in this sample. This data does not factor in what the ultimate decision was based upon and parents may play a much more or much less significant role than quantitative instrument was able to understand.

In discussing this topic with interview participants, one student described a funnel like process:

“When I first started talking to my teacher about studying abroad my parents weren’t involved. When I decided to go to America they (parents) supported my decision but had a lot of concerns since I am their only child. I was able to use my friends in America and the UK to learn answers.”

This student identified the one child restrictions in China as a reason why their parents were important in their decision to study at UNL and used their peer network and their academic authorities in China to find answers to these concerns. This was the only of the three participants who brought up this topic when discussing the importance of their parents in their decision.

### **Research Question 3: Communication with UNL Prior to Enrolling**

The third research question was designed to capture the influence of different methods of communication that students received and are listed in Table 6.

Table 6

## Percent Distribution of Communication

#	Question	N	Yes	No	$\bar{x}$	SD
1	Visit from UNL representative	25.00	48%	52%	1.52	.510
2	Phone call from UNL staff member	25.00	28%	72%	1.72	.458
3	Phone call from UNL student	25.00	20%	80%	1.80	.408
4	Email	25.00	88%	12%	1.12	.332
5	Text Message	25.00	28%	72%	1.72	.458
6	Campus Visit	25.00	36%	64%	1.64	.490

Compared to the first two research questions, the results for the third question were much more negative. The only form of communication on which participants answered “Yes” in response to whether they communicated with UNL in that medium was “Email” with 88% of participants responding in the affirmative. The only other variable that even came close to being positive was “Visit from UNL Representative” to which 48% of respondents indicated they had received. Other forms of phone communication including texts and calls from UNL students and staff members were consistent and low with no more than 28% of respondents indicating they had interacted with UNL through phone calls or texts. Two of the interview participants listed email as the only form of communication they had with UNL while one received a visit from a UNL recruiter at their university.

**Research Question 4: First Contact with UNL**

The final research question was included to understand from where the participants first had contact with UNL and is included in Table 7.

The results of Question 4 reinforce the significance of educational authorities in China in the decision making process. It is likely that this influence diminishes over time as the student peer group becomes more significant in the decision making process as noted in Table 4. Of the respondents that indicated “Other,” one listed “2+2 Program” which is likely in reference to a degree completion program UNL has with an institution in China while the other students list “book.” Interview participants indicate a combination of teachers in China and friends who were already studying at UNL.



Table 7

## Percent Distributions of First Contact with UNL

#	Question	n	%
1	Website	25	8%
2	Educational Agent	25	8%
3	Academic counselor at your school in China	25	32%
4	Teacher at your School in China	25	32%
5	Friend	25	12%
6	Other	25	8%

### Conclusion

The results reported in the preceding chapter discuss findings addressing the four research questions as administered by the quantitative instrument and qualitative survey. The quantitative results reinforced much of what is known about the influence of institutional characteristics and influencers but identified relationships between these variables that were significant to current first-year Chinese undergraduate students at UNL. The qualitative survey shed important light on these factors and allowed the researcher to explore these responses in more depth. In summary, students place a high level of value on items such as safety, future academic and career prospects, and financial considerations. Parents are very important to the decision making but their high level of influence is largely independent of other factors such as peers, academic authorities in China and UNL institutional representatives.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Discussion**

Current literature on college student choice lacks extensive research on Chinese college student choice. Through existing literature it is known that factors such as cost of tuition, availability of scholarships, and future career opportunities, among other factors, are valued by Chinese students (Bodycott, 2009; Boycott & Lai, 2012; He & Bonham, 2011; Park, 2010; Simpson & Tan, 2009; Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007; Wang, 2007). Furthermore, Chinese students rely heavily on family and peer networks for success (Bohman, 2010; Massey, et al. 2003; Prado, 2008; Bodycott & Lai, 2012). The results from this study provide interesting insight into these and other choices made by first year Chinese undergraduate students at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. This chapter discusses the findings and develops an understanding of how the UNL student experience relates to literature discussed in Chapter Two.

#### **The Role of Institutional Characteristics and Influencers**

At the beginning of the process in choosing to study at UNL, the majority of participants (64%) were first introduced to UNL through a teacher or academic counselor at their school. Although this study did not examine in what form that introduction was made, this helps to explain why there is correlation between the importance of the influence from UNL staff and their academic authorities in China and a sense of credibility that exists between the two through the college choice process. The next highest method of first contact was friends, all measure of which had a strong, positive and significant correlation with “UNL Staff” members.

Based on the high level of respondents indicating “Academic Counselors at your School in China” and “Teacher at your School in China” in their initial identification of UNL in Question 4 and the significant role played by other influencers, it appears that the role of academic authorities diminishes as students gather more information from their peers, alumni, and university representatives. In Chapter Four it was noted that as the variables “Friends at Other Universities in the USA” and “UNL Staff Member” had a moderate positive correlation that was significant. Similarly, a positive moderate relationship existed between “Friends at Other Universities in the USA” and “UNL Staff Member”. These relationships may suggest a certain level of credibility is developed as prospective students interacted with both groups of influencers although additional research would be necessary to understand the direction of the credibility from one variable to the other.

As family and peer relationships are influential to students success it is not surprising that their role would grow as students become more committed to studying abroad (Massey, et al. 2003; Prado, 2008). It is not clear at what point or in what roll parents begin exerting influence but it is also clear that parents are an important part of the decision making unto themselves and independent of other influencers as evidenced by the large percent of students who value them as being "Very Important" in their decision to study at UNL.

The results make clear that targeted communication and messaging are important as students often have few channels through which to directly communicate with UNL. The vast majority, 88%, of participants communicated with UNL by email while no more than 48% had personal contact with a UNL staff member. This may

help to explain the potential credibility relationship between UNL staff members and students' peers and academic authorities in China. Bohman (2010) noted the importance of peers at universities outside of China and alumni for Chinese students. As students receive messages from UNL it is possible that they relied on their peers and academic authorities to confirm information and gain clarity on specific characteristics being shared through marketing messages. This research is not able to confirm or deny that relationship.

The credibility that may potentially exist between UNL staff members and student friends also seems to exist between UNL staff members and other academic authority figures from their schools in China. Although there was no significance and only a very weak correlation between "Parents" and "UNL Staff Member," strong and moderately strong relationships existed between "UNL Staff Member" when correlated with "Teacher at Your School in China," "Academic Counselor at your School in China," and "Educational Agent." The researcher chose to include "Educational Agent" with these other two influencers as two interview participants independently equated the role of agents to that of academic counselors in their secondary schools in China.

The only variable to which "UNL Staff Member" did not have a significant relationship with was "Parents" further indicating the independent nature of the significance parents play as influencers in the student decision making process. When measuring the importance of parents, 40% of participants indicated parents were very important ( $\bar{X} = 3.72$ ) compared to 36% indicating UNL staff as being very important ( $\bar{X} = 3.08$ ). Although these two items received the highest percentages compared to

other variables, more participants placed higher importance in parents in their decision making.

This was counterintuitive to responses from interview participants, all of whom indicated that their parents played more of a support role in their decision making by supporting their decision to study at UNL. The phrasing of the item in the quantitative survey and the nature of the data collection tool may not have captured the understanding of the participants' response to the influence of their parents in the same way the qualitative instrument was able to.

The negative relationship between "Educational Agent" and "Parents" is surprising as Zhang & Hagedorn (2011) found that this can be influenced by parent education level as well as social class standing and financial resources of parents. This may suggest that parents of UNL undergraduate Chinese students are more educated than those in the sample of Zhang & Hagedorn's (2011) study. It could also have more to do with the level of English in the sample as Zhang & Hagedorn (2011) found that students with higher levels of English proficiency were more comfortable navigating the admission process without the use of agents. More likely, other factors were simply more influential to students as sample mean for "Educational Agent" was just slightly above the neutral response, "Neither Important or Unimportant" ( $\bar{X} = 3.24$ ).

### **Bias and Participation**

Overall, only 12% of students in the population completed the survey and only 12% of those that completed the quantitative instrument participated in the qualitative portion of the study. Although strong levels of significance existed

between many variables, sampling bias may exist as the sample is likely too small to be representative of the overall population of new undergraduate Chinese students at UNL. Furthermore, the number of students who were initially conditionally admitted and enrolled in an English program represented only 8% of the total sample making it unlikely that their voice was proportionally represented.

Based on the high percent of students who had received a school visit (48%) it is likely that a large majority of the participants may have known the researcher or a colleague from the Office of Admissions and may have felt a personal connection in responding. Although the results of this research cannot confirm or deny this potential bias, it is unlikely that this is a representative sample due to the vast geographic size of China and the financial investment necessary to travel and visit schools representing 48% of the total population group. Had the survey asked participants to identify their schools or even a geographic location in China such as their province or city of origin this type of analysis would be possible.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Although the general framework and results of this research may be applicable to other similar institutions, there are several elements that could be altered, removed or added to improve the response rate as well as the overall understanding of Chinese undergraduate student choice.

The first item would be to develop materials in Mandarin to capture a larger, more representative sample. English language programs to help non-native English speaking students develop cultural and academic language skills can be a major pipeline for student enrollment and surveys not designed to meet their language needs

will almost certainly skew results to those students who have the ability and confidence to participate in English. Collaborating with Chinese graduate students on this type of research may also offer a higher degree of representation and reduce sampling error. Chinese researchers may be more sensitive to cultural norms that may deter undergraduate Chinese students from participating in this type of research. It may also be beneficial to study this group as its own unique population instead of assuming their responses would match those of students with the language skills necessary to begin their academic program immediately.

The second element to change would be the time frame of data collection. In future studies, beginning the implementation of the quantitative instrument as soon as population arrives on campus may yield higher responses especially if coupled with official channels on campus. By collaborating with other offices that implement programming such as orientation or those who manage important processes such as the immigration check-in, students may be more likely to feel a sense of importance in completing the quantitative instrument. This collaboration would further allow campuses such as UNL to develop programming that is important to students (Copland & Garton, 2011; Guo & Chase, 2010; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2008; Tinto, 1993).

Another way to expand participation would be to conduct this research with a larger population of students such as all undergraduate Chinese students. This may create additional bias based on their perception of the importance of university characteristics since they have been on campus and accessed many of the services or benefits that may have been used to recruit them. Alternatively, it may develop an

understanding of perceived importance versus actual importance once on campus. Due to the influential nature of the parent relationship described by Bodycott & Lai (2012) as well as others, involving parents in the data collection would also allow researchers to expand the understanding of the parent relationships to other influencers and academic characteristics.

### **Conclusions**

The goal of this study was to develop a better understanding of the importance of factors and influencers that impact first-year Chinese undergraduate student college choice and specifically the experience of choosing the University of Nebraska–Lincoln for undergraduate study. By utilizing the quantitative instrument and qualitative survey, students were able to share their experience and provide insights into the process of choosing UNL and the importance of what is communicated to them by UNL as well as influencers in their lives. This showed that students rely heavily on email communication with UNL. Students also rely heavily on peer, family, and academic networks with different points of influence for academic authorities, peers and parents at different points in their admission process. The results suggest this is a process of building trust in an institution and its characteristics through information gained from their personal networks.

As international students continue to make up a growing percentage of the student population on campuses across the United States it is critical that institutions understand the experience of students in the recruitment and admission process (Copland & Garton, 2011; Guo & Chase, 2010; Harper & Quaye, 2009). Understanding factors such as financial impacts, the importance of career prospects



and the involvement of influencers on students creates an environment in which institutions and students can each find the right fit (He & Bonham, 2011; Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007 Massey, et al. 2003; Prado, 2008; Bodycott & Lai, 2012). By understanding the importance of these factors in the Chinese student recruitment and admission process, institutions will improve the process for students each year, creating long term potential for future Chinese student enrollment.

## References

- Bartlett, T., & Fischer, K. (November 3, 2011). The China conundrum: American colleges find the Chinese-student boom a tricky fit. *Chronicle of Higher Education* (online), November 5, 2011. [http://chronicle.com/article/Chinese-Students-Prove-a/129628/?sid=at&utm\\_source=at&utm\\_medium=en](http://chronicle.com/article/Chinese-Students-Prove-a/129628/?sid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en)
- Boddycott, P. (2009). Choosing a higher education study abroad destination: What mainland Chinese parents and students rate as important. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 8 (3), 349-373.
- Boddycott, P. & Lai, A (2012). The Influence and Implications of Chinese Culture in the Decision to Undertake Cross-Border Higher Education. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 16 (3), 252-270.
- Bogdan, C. R., & Biklen, S. K. (2003). *Qualitative research for education* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Bohman, E. (2010). Headed for the Heartland: Decision Making Process of Community College Bound International Students. *Community College Journal Of Research & Practice*, 34(1/2), 64-77.
- Doi:10.1080/10668920903385848

- Bourdieu, P. (2011/1986). The forms of capital. In A.R. Sadovnik, *Sociology of education: A critical reader (2nd Edition)*. New York: Routledge, 83-95.
- Choudaha, R. (2011). Global: The Future of International Student Mobility (online), November 5, 2011. *University World News*.  
<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20110930190559493>
- Cohen, A. M. & Kisker, C.B. (2010). *The Shaping of American Higher Education: Emergence and Growth of the Contemporary System*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.
- Coleman, J.S. (1961). In Massey, D.S., Charles, C.Z., Lundy, G.F., Fischer, M.J. (2003). *The source of the river: The social origins of freshmen at America's selective colleges and universities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Copland, F., & Garton, S. (2011). "I felt that I do live in the UK now": International students' self-reports of their English language speaking experiences on a pre-sessional programme. *Language and Education*, 25(3), 241-255.
- De Luca, Marisa (2010). "Agent" a Dirty Word? Institute of International Education (online), November 5, 2011. <http://www.iienetwork.org/page/124192/>

- Department of State. (2014). *Student Visas*. Retrieved from <http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/study-exchange/student.html>
- Guo, S., & Chase, M. (2011). Internationalisation of higher education: Integrating international students into Canadian academic environment. *Teaching in Higher Education, 16*(3), 305-318.
- Harper, S.R., & Quaye, S.J. (Eds.) (2009). *Student engagement in higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for diverse populations*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hazelkorn, Ellen (October 24, 2011). It's Time to Move Beyond Rankings. Chronicle of Higher Education (online), November 5, 2011. [http://chronicle.com/blogs/worldwise/its-time-to-move-beyond-rankings-2/28830?sid=at&utm\\_source=at&utm\\_medium=en](http://chronicle.com/blogs/worldwise/its-time-to-move-beyond-rankings-2/28830?sid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en)
- He, Y. & Banham, H. (2011). Education destination determinants of Chinese students. *Journal of International Education Research, 7* (4), 19-32.
- Hwang, M. H., & Heppner, M.J. (2001). *Korean career choices: Cross-cultural validity of measures and inventories*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Sand Francisco, CA.

Institute of International Education (2013). Open Doors: Fast Facts. Institute of International Education (online). <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Leading-Places-of-Origin/2011-13>

Johanna Julia, V. Lassi, L., & Esa, M. (2011). Customer orientation in higher education: the missing link in international student recruitment? A relationship marketing approach. *Industry & Higher Education* 25(2). 77-91.

Johnson, J. (September 2, 2011). *U.S. Colleges Seek Foreign Students for Intellectual Stimulus, Bottom Line* (Online), November 5, 2011. Washington Post. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/us-colleges-seek-foreign-students-for-intellectual-stimulus-better-bottom-line/2011/08/22/gIQAFeVlwJ\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/us-colleges-seek-foreign-students-for-intellectual-stimulus-better-bottom-line/2011/08/22/gIQAFeVlwJ_story.html)

Massey, D.S., Charles, C.Z., Lundy, G.F., Fischer, M.J. (2003). *The source of the river: The social origins of freshmen at America's selective colleges and universities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Mertens, D. M. (2010). *Research and evaluation in educational psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Michie, J. (2000). *Reader's guide to social sciences*. New York: Routledge.
- Nattavud, P. (2003). The Influence of Peers and Student Recruitment Agencies on Thai Students' Choices of International Education. *Journal Of Studies In International Education*, 7(2). 178-192.
- Onowugbuzie, A.J., & Teddie, C. (2002). A framework ofr analyzing data in mixed methods research. In A. Tashakorri & C. Teddie (Eds.), *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research* (p.p. 351-384). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Park, E. (2009). Analysis of Korean students' international mobility by 2-D model: driving force factor and directional factor. *Higher Education*,57(6), 741-755.  
Doi:10.1007/s10734-008-9173-x
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Perlman, Harvey. "State of the University Address 2011." University of Nebraska – Lincoln. Lincoln, NE. 1 Sept. 2011.

- Poyrazli, S & Grahame, K (2007). Barriers to Adjustment: Needs of International Students within a Semi-Urban Campus Community. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, Vol. 34, No. 1, pp. 28-45.
- Prado, J. (2008/2009). Comparing educational trajectories of two Chinese students and one Latina student, a social capital approach. *High School Journal*, 92 (2), 14-27.
- Simpson, K. & Tan, Weihua. (2009). A home away from home?: Chinese student evaluations of an overseas study experience. *Journal of Studies in International Education*. 13, 5-21.
- Teddie, C., & Tasahkkori, A. (2009). *Foundations of mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tinto, V. (1993). In Massey, D.S., Charles, C.Z., Lundy, G.F., Fischer, M.J. (2003). *The source of the river: The social origins of freshmen at America's selective colleges and universities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- University of Nebraska – Lincoln (2014). *Factbook 2014-2015*. Lincoln, NE: Institutional Research and Planning.

- Verbik, L. & Lasanowski, V. (2007). International student mobility: Patterns and trends. *The Observatory and Borderless Higher Education*, September 2007, 1-48.
- Wang, Z. (2007). Key factors that influence recruiting young Chinese students. *International Education Journal*, 8(2), 37-48.
- Whiteside, R. (2001). Models for successful change. In *The SEM revolution*, edited by J. Black. Washington, DC: American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers.  
<http://www2.aacrao.org/sem/index.cfm?fa=view&id=5216>
- Wildavsky, Ben (2011). Against Ambivalence: Why Immigration Policymakers Should Welcome Foreign Students. *Chronicle of Higher Education* (online), November 5, 2011. [http://chronicle.com/blogs/worldwise/against-ambivalence-why-immigration-policymakers-should-welcome-foreign-students/28789?sid=at&utm\\_source=at&utm\\_medium=en](http://chronicle.com/blogs/worldwise/against-ambivalence-why-immigration-policymakers-should-welcome-foreign-students/28789?sid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en)
- Xiang, B. & Shen, W. (2009). International student migration and social stratification in China. *International Journal of Educational Development*. 29 (5), 513-522.



Xueqin, J. (2011, November 3). Selecting the Right Chinese Students. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/selecting-the-right-chinese/129621>

Yakunina, E. S., Weigold, I. K., & McCarthy, A. S. (2011). Group counseling with international students: Practical, ethical, and cultural considerations. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*, 25(1), 67-78.

Zhang, Y. and Hagedorn, L. (2011) College Application With or Without Assistance of an Education Agent: Experience of International Chinese Undergraduates in the US. *Journal of College Admission, Summer 2011*, 6 – 16.

## Appendix A

### Initial Recruitment Message for Quantitative Survey Participation

Dear <<Student Name>>:

On behalf of the Office of Admissions and Jake Hoy-Elswick you are invited to participate in an optional survey to better understand why you chose to study at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

This study is a collaborative effort between the Office of Admissions and Mr. Hoy-Elswick, the results of which will be used in future recruiting efforts and in completing Mr. Hoy-Elswick's graduate thesis which focuses on undergraduate Chinese student college choice. Your opinions would be greatly valued.

Please take 5 minutes to complete the survey. After completing the survey you will have the opportunity to win one of two \$25 gift certificates to the University Book Store.

Please complete the survey at: *survey link*

Please direct any questions to Jake Hoy-Elswick by emailing [jakehoy@experience.unl.edu](mailto:jakehoy@experience.unl.edu).

Sincerely,

James Griesen

## Appendix B

### Follow-up Recruitment Message for Quantitative Survey Participation

Dear <<Student Name>>:

On behalf of the Office of Admissions and Jake Hoy-Elswick you are invited to participate in an optional survey to better understand why you chose to study at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

This study is a collaborative effort between the Office of Admissions and Mr. Hoy-Elswick, the results of which will be used in future recruiting efforts and in completing Mr. Hoy-Elswick's graduate thesis which focuses on undergraduate Chinese student college choice. Your opinions would be greatly valued.

Please take 5 minutes to complete the survey. After completing the survey you will have the opportunity to win one of two \$25 gift certificates to the University Book Store.

Please complete the survey at: *survey link*

Please direct any questions to Jake Hoy-Elswick by emailing [jakehoy@experience.unl.edu](mailto:jakehoy@experience.unl.edu).

Sincerely,

James Griesen

## Appendix C

### Second Recruitment Message for Personal Interview Participation

Subject: Chinese Student College Choice Follow-Up Discussion – Free Dinner!

Thank you for completing the collaborative survey between the Office of Admissions and Jake Hoy-Elswick.

To better understand the results of the initial survey you are invited to participate in one hour long follow up discussion. This will allow us to develop a stronger understanding for why you chose to study at UNL. All answers will appear anonymously in the final research paper.

This one-hour session will be scheduled at your convenience and will take place in the Office of admissions. A light dinner will be provided.

If you are able to participate, please confirm your attendance at the following link:  
**LINK.**

Please contact Jake Hoy-Elswick with any questions at [jakehoy@experience.unl.edu](mailto:jakehoy@experience.unl.edu).

Sincerely,

James Griesen

## Appendix D

### Survey Informed Consent

The purpose of this study is to further understand the experiences of undergraduate Chinese student college choice at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Participation in this study will require you to complete an online survey (approximately 5 minutes).

As a benefit of this research, you will have the opportunity to share what factors influenced your decision to attend UNL. You will also have the opportunity to enter in a drawing for one of two \$25 gift cards to the University Book Store after completing the entire survey. Odds of winning one of the gift cards are 2:98

The study will contribute to the body of knowledge of Chinese student college choice and may aid in recruitment efforts at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The survey will take place online and will take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. The survey responses will be completely anonymous and your name will not be linked to your responses. The information gathered in this study will be submitted as a master's thesis and may be presented in journals or at professional conferences; however, participating individuals will be unidentifiable.

You may ask any questions concerning this research by contacting Jake Hoy-Elswick at [jakehoy@experience.unl.edu](mailto:jakehoy@experience.unl.edu) or 402-472-0981 or my academic advisor, Dr. James Griesen at [jgriesen1@unl](mailto:jgriesen1@unl) or (402) 472-3725. You may also contact the Research Compliance Services Office at [irb@unl.edu](mailto:irb@unl.edu) or 402-472-6965 with questions or concerns about the research.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researcher or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By completing and submitting your survey responses, you are providing your consent to participate in this research. You will be contacted at a future date and invited to voluntarily participate in a focus group to further understand your college choice experiences.

Please print or save a copy of this informed consent form for your records.

Participants must be 19 years of age or older.

Please enter your initials in the box below to confirm your consent to participate.

## **Appendix E**

### **Interview Informed Consent**

Title: Undergraduate Chinese Student College Choice IRB# 20141014733 EX

#### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to further understand the experiences of undergraduate Chinese student college choice at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The study will contribute to the body of knowledge of Chinese student college choice and may aid in recruitment efforts at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

#### **Procedures:**

Participation in this portion of the study will require you to attend an interview session regarding your experience in choosing to study at UNL.

You will be asked to respond to two questions and discuss these responses.

The interview will take place in the UNL Office of Admissions and will last approximately 45-60 minutes.

#### **Benefits:**

This research will give you the opportunity to share your experiences in choosing to study at UNL and will contribute to a better understanding of why undergraduate Chinese students choose to pursue their bachelor's degree at UNL. Information gained from this research may be used in designing future recruitment efforts in China.

#### **Risks and/or Discomforts:**

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

#### **Confidentiality:**

Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept confidential.

The data will be stored in a password-protected computer and in a password protected storage database. The data will only be seen by the principal investigator during the study, and will be discarded after the completion of the study. The information obtained in this study will be submitted as a master's thesis and may be published in

scientific journals or presented at professional conferences but the participating individuals will be unidentifiable.

**Opportunity to Ask Questions:**

You may ask any questions concerning this research at any time by contacting the investigator the principal investigator, Jake Hoy-Elswick or thesis advisor, James Griesen. If you would like to speak to someone else, please contact Research Compliance Services Office at (402) 472-6965 or irb@unl.edu.

**Freedom to Withdraw:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researcher or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:**

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented.

Participants must be 19 years of age or older.

Signature of Participant:

Date:

---

**Name and Phone number of investigator**

Jake Hoy-Elswick, Principal Investigator.

jakehoy@experience.unl.edu

Office Phone Number: (402) 472-0981

Dr. James Griesen, Educational Administration Professor, Thesis Advisor.

jgriesen1@unl.edu

Office Phone Number: (402) 472-3725

## Appendix F

### Quantitative Survey

What is your gender?

- a) Female
- b) Male
- c) I prefer not to disclose

Which best describes your student status?

- a) Freshmen
- b) Transfer

Do you live on campus?

- a) Yes
- b) No

Which Best Describes your current academic program

- a) Intensive English Program (IEP)
- b) College English for Academic Purposes English Bridge Program (CEAP)
- c) Academic Degree Program (Full Admission)

To how many colleges did you apply?

- a) 1-3
- b) 4-6
- c) 7-9
- d) 10-12
- e) More than 12

How influential were the following factors in your decision to study at UNL (5 Point Likert scale from “Not at all important” to “Very important”)?

1. Availability of Academic Scholarships
2. Cost of Tuition
3. Availability of on-campus housing
4. Cost of on-campus housing
5. Safety on campus
6. Safety in the city of Lincoln
7. Location of the university in the United States
8. University rankings
9. Career opportunities
10. Graduate school opportunities
11. Academic program
12. Size of UNL
13. Size of Lincoln, NE



How influential were the following people in your decision to study at UNL (5 Point Likert scale from Not at all important to Very important)?

1. Parents
2. Friends in China
3. Friends already studying at UNL
4. Friends at other universities in the USA
5. Teacher at your school in China
6. Academic counselor at your school in China
7. UNL staff member
8. UNL Alumni
9. Educational Agent

Please indicate any of the ways you communicated with UNL while making your decision to study at UNL (Yes or no response):

1. Visit from UNL representative
2. Phone call from UNL staff member
3. Phone call from UNL student
4. Email
5. Text Message
6. Campus Visit

Please indicate how you first heard about UNL (single choice from list of options):

1. Family
2. Friend
3. Teacher at your school in China
4. Academic counselor at your school in China
5. UNL Staff Member
6. UNL Alumni
7. UNL Email
8. Educational Agent
9. University rankings
10. Website
11. Advertisement
12. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your time in completing this survey. Your responses have been recorded and will be helpful in my Master's thesis, which may contribute to the knowledge of undergraduate Chinese student college choice at UNL.

To be entered to win one of two \$25 University Book Store gift certificates, please email my advisor at [jgriesen1@unl.edu](mailto:jgriesen1@unl.edu) with the following in the subject line: Hoy-Elswick survey completed. Once you enter the contest, your name and email will not be included in future reminders.

If you have additional questions or concerns about the research you may contact me at [jakehoy@experience.unl.edu](mailto:jakehoy@experience.unl.edu), or my advisor, Dr. Jim Griesen at [jgriesen1@unl.edu](mailto:jgriesen1@unl.edu).

Thank you for your participation and good luck this semester!

Sincerely,

James Griesen

## **Appendix G**

### **Individual Interview Questions**

Question 1:

Who were the most influential people in your decision to study at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln?

Question 2:

What were the most influential factors in your decision to study at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln?

**Appendix H****Office of Admissions Collaborative Letter**

OFFICE OF ADMISSIONS

September 18, 2014

Institutional Review Board  
ALEX West  
312 N. 14<sup>th</sup> Street  
Lincoln, NE 68588

Dear Committee Members:

The Office of Admissions has agreed to provide support to Jake Hoy-Elswick in his research project regarding undergraduate Chinese student college choice under the general direction of advisor Dr. James Griesen in the Department of Educational Administration.

Based on the request and plan forwarded to the Office of Admissions, we agree to collaborate on this study in a joint effort. Results from this research may be used in guiding future strategic planning for international recruitment efforts in China.

Please contact me if you have further questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amber Williams".

Amber Williams  
Director  
Office of Admissions

## Appendix I

### Office of the University Registrar Support Letter



OFFICE OF THE UNIVERSITY REGISTRAR

September 18, 2014

Internal Review Board  
ALEX West  
312 N 14th  
Lincoln, NE 68588- 0415

Dear Committee Members,

The Office of the Registrar has agreed to provide support to Jacob Hoy-Elswick in his research project regarding the undergraduate Chinese student college choice, under the general direction of Professor James Griesen within the Department of Educational Administration.

Based on the request and plan forwarded to my office we will provide a selected list of student e-mail addresses that match the population selected for this research. We will provide a file of unattributed e-mail addresses to Dr. James Griesen that will be used to invite students to voluntarily participate in the study.

If you have any further questions, please contact me at 402-472-2082.  
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Juan Carlos Gutierrez".

Juan Carlos Gutierrez  
Assistant Registrar, Systems & Research